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ABSTRACT

A study investigated whether excessive television viewing coupled with communication suppression by parents in the preschool years had a distinct impact on the development of communication apprehension (CA) in children and on college-age young people. Subjects (average age 21.8 years and 99% Caucasian) were selected from speech classes at a southern United States junior college in order to give a broad spectrum of apprehension or lack thereof. A self-report questionnaire and the last six questions of the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension. Results indicated that: (1) excessive television viewing in early childhood was linked to communication apprehension; and (2) there was a non-significant relationship between television viewing and communication suppression. A discussion of these issues could serve as a warning for parents who want their children to avoid communication apprehension. (Three tables of data are included; 27 references and the self-report questionnaire are attached.) (RS)

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The Effects of Television Viewing and Communication Suppression on Communication Apprehension

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THE EFFECTS OF TELEVISION VIEWING AND COMMUNICATION SUPPRESSION ON COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

Abstract

This study indicates that television viewing has a correlational interaction with communication apprehension. The study investigated the viewing habits of children from three to eight years of age, and the resulting CA or lack thereof, as college students.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

This research seeks to demonstrate that excessive television viewing coupled with communication suppression by parents in the preschool years has a distinct impact on the development of communication apprehension (CA) in children. The study proposes that children who spend more time watching television than interacting with parents, siblings, and friends are at-risk of developing communication apprehension because they have not learned the appropriate means for interacting with others. The time they should have been learning to interact, (speak and listen appropriately) was consumed with TV viewing. Although TV viewing provided them with social gratification it did not provide practice in communication.

In addition, the study proposes that communication suppression by parents is harmful to the child for the same reasons. If the child attempts to communicate with parents, and is told to wait, or to be quiet, or to go outside, etc., the child is denied time and practice in communication that he/she needs to become a functioning communicator. As a result, the child grows into a shy, quiet, withdrawn adolescent, and CA becomes more firmly established as attempts to communicate publicly are unsuccessful due to lack of practice. By the time the person reaches college and is required to take a course in which public speaking and interaction are requisite, the pattern of CA is so firmly established that real trauma is encountered.

COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

CA is defined by McCroskey (1977) as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons.

Spielberger (1966) and Lamb (1973) have made a distinction between what they call "trait" and "state" apprehension. Trait apprehension is characterized by fear or anxiety with respect to many different types of oral

communication encounters: talking to a single person, speaking within a small group, or giving a speech before a large crowd (McCroskey, 1981). Trait CA is not characteristic of normal, well-adjusted individuals. (McCroskey, 1977).

In contrast, "state apprehension is specific to a given oral communication situation, such as giving a particular speech to a group of strangers or interviewing with an important person for a new job at a given time and place". (McCroskey, 1977).

This study examines trait CA as it affects the child and young adult in a school setting. Comadena and Prusank (1988) studied the correlation between CA and academic achievement. They showed that students high in CA as compared to students low and moderate in CA, demonstrated the lowest levels of learning. According to their results students low in CA had mathematics achievement scores that were 23% higher than students high in CA.
McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, & Payne (1989) indicate that CA is conceptualized as a causal agent in student success, both academic and interpersonal. Those two factors have been identified by prior research as primary predictors of persistence. A four year longitudinal study of the impact of CA on grade point average and persistence at the university level was conducted. The results indicated that

high CA students were more likely to drop out and attain lower grade point averages than low CA students.

"While the causes of CA are not, and may never be, fully known, both case study analyses (Phillips and Butt, 1966) and broader surveys...suggest the development of CA during early childhood years. The crucial communication events appear to occur before school enrollment. Some research suggests that the emergence of a "critical period" for communication develops during the first three years of life (Daly, 1977). But certainly by early adolescence, anxiety is a stable individual characteristic (Bronson, 1966: Kagan & Moss, 1962). It is clear that many children enter kindergarten with high levels of CA already established" (McCroskey, 1977). McCroskey believes it is a learned trait, one that is conditioned through reinforcement for the child's communication behaviors.

"The etiology of CA has received comparatively little attention in the literature. Throughout the social sciences only two major explanations of the differential trait-like behaviors of individuals hold sway: heredity and environment" (McCroskey, 1981). Social biologists do not argue that heredity is the only cause of sociability or CA, but suggest that heredity may be one of the contributing causes. Children are born with personality predispositions that are not unchangeable. Thus, the child's environment

will have impact on the predispositions the child carries over into later life. Because children are born with different predispositions, they will react differently to the same environmental conditions. This interaction of heredity and environment is seen as the precursor of adult predispositions and tendencies such as CA. The three environmental conditions suggested in literature are: reinforcement, skills acquisition, and modeling (Daly, 1977). It is essential to recognize the obvious overlap among these explanations and to understand that the effects of the different models (rather than any single model) combine to create the development and maintenance of CA (Daly & Friedrich, 1981). McCroskey (1981) states that most writers allege that reinforcement patterns in a person's environment, particularly during childhood, are the dominant elements.

An explanation based on skill acquisition suggests that the apprehensive child becomes so because of a failure to acquire the necessary skills for social interaction. In many cases, this failure is not one of absence, but one of relative acquisition rate: the high CA child fails to develop the necessary skills as rapidly as the low CA child (Daly & Friedrich, 1981).

The final explanation of the development of CA is based upon the child's imitation of others whom he or she

observes in social interaction (Daly & Friedrich, 1981). It would stand to reason that a young child might imitate the communication style of his parents or primary care givers. Taken together, the three nongenetic explanations for the development of CA share certain emphases. All suggest the predominance of positive communication environments for discouraging apprehension in a child. These environments, the others who occupy them should provide a high level of positive reinforcement for interaction attempts, offer good skills training, and present adequate models of communication and sociability (Daly & Friedrich, 1981). This study focuses on the non-genetic, environmental elements of the etiology of CA, considering that the child will experience reinforcement, skill acquisition, and modeling in the home environment before she arrives at school.

COMMUNICATION SUPPRESSION

Friedrich and Daly (1981) argue that the two most significant environments for children are the home and the school; children spend the bulk of their time in those two environments. Home environments vary in the amount of interaction: some families have high incidence of talk; others are more quiet (Friedlander, Jacobs, Davis, &

Wetsone, 1972). In many cases, the parental style can be marked by "communication suppression" (Griffin & Heider, 1967).

In Daly and Friedrich's study (1981), it was shown that the most important parent/home variable was the amount of perceived encouragement and reward the individual received for communication. If a child is reinforced for being silent and is not reinforced for communicating, the probable result is a quiet child. Additionally, if the child often experiences some aversive experience e.g. parent shouting, big brother hitting when attempting to communicate, the quiet child result is even more probable. Such a child is likely to enter school with a well-established, high level of CA (McCroskey, 1977).

TELEVISION VIEWING

A third factor in the study, is that "children who watch a lot of television are missing out on opportunities to experience social interaction" (Zimbardo, 1977).

The single strongest indicator that television viewing might be dysfunctional to social activity is in a report to the Surgeon General on Television and Social Behavior (Dorr, 1972). The report states that low-TV-user-first-graders reported higher levels of daily play with other

children compared to high-TV-user-groups. And "among child rearing practices associated with high TV viewing were...demands for obedience and quiet..."

Greenberg (1974) studying British children's viewing habits categorized different reasons that children watch TV. One of the categories was companionship, and the children stated such reasons for watching TV as: "it's almost like a human friend". Those children were interacting with the TV in a parasocial manner; they were substituting TV for people with whom they could interact. The time spent in a non-interacting environment, such as in front of the TV, takes away time for learning social interaction skills, and leaves the child inept in coping with people in social situations, such as interpersonal or public speaking settings.

Since it has been argued that CA 1. is mainly environmental, 2. and is developed in the years before school, or shortly thereafter, the home environment seems to be the most influential on the preschool child. Two of the most powerful factors present in the home are the parents, and the television set. Lyle and Hoffman's (1971) study of preschool children and their television viewing habits reveal that television does play an important part in the life of the three to five year old. Even the youngest children watch television regularly on a daily

basis, especially during the afternoons and on Saturday mornings.

HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis One: The preschool/elementary child who watches more than two hours of television per day will be more likely to develop CA.

Hypothesis Two: The preschool/elementary child who receives communication suppression will be more likely to develop CA.

Hypothesis Three: Preschool/elementary school children who watch more than two hours of television per day and who receive communication suppression will display higher levels of communication apprehension than children who watch less television and are encouraged by parents to express themselves orally.

METHODS

I. Subjects

The sample was taken from the Speech 1113 classes at a Southern junior college. They were selected in order to give a broad spectrum of apprehension or lack thereof. Past investigation, based on written self-evaluation during the first week of the semester, had shown that most of the institution's speech classes had an average of 55% of moderately to severely apprehensive students. The average age of the students was 21.8 years. The majority of these students were traditional freshmen taking their general education requirements in a university parallel program. They were attending college for the first time and were from a moderate to high socio-economic bracket. Ninety-nine percent were Caucasian. There was a small percentage of non-traditional students who were returning to college for retraining after years in the work force.

II. DESIGN

Data from these respondents were analyzed using a 2 x 2 ANOVA -TV viewing (lo/hi) by communication suppression (lo/hi). The dependent measure was the respondent's CA score. Then follow up tests were done using two One-way tests. TV by CA and communication suppression by CA.

III. VARIABLES

The degree of CA was the dependent variable. Low (under two hours) versus high (over two hours) amounts of TV viewing, and communication suppression by parents versus parental encouragement to talk were the independent variables.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, excessive television viewing was operationalized as self report of viewing more than two hours of TV per day. The levels used were: Low, none to 1.9 hours per day; high, two to four hours per day.

Communication suppression was operationalized as self report of parents' "advocating and praising behavior that leads to a reserved manner of self-presentation" (Freidman, 1980), which is represented in the testing by "high" suppression. The alternative is parental reinforcement of conversational skills, which lead to a confident manner of self-presentation, which is represented by "low" suppression.

IV. INSTRUMENTATION

A self report questionnaire (see Appendix A) and the last six questions of the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) which dealt with speech giving were

used as research tools. Only the public speaking portion of the PRCA was used because this study focused on CA manifested by college students in a public speaking situation. The PRCA is "a 25 item version of the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension..., which assesses the anxiety by summing the individual's responses to five-step, Likert-type scales. The measure, developed by McCroskey..., has traditionally maintained high reliability in terms of internal consistency." (Daly, Friedrich, 1981). It has strong indications of both concurrent and predictive validity (McCroskey, Sorenson, & Daly, 1976). The PRCA was chosen over other similar measures since, it incorporates most other measures of the individual difference while maintaining high reliability (Daly, Friedrich, 1981). It was used to determine the level of CA present in each student when giving a speech.

Then the students answered a self-report questionnaire designed to ascertain how much television they watched between ages three and eight, and what type of conversational reinforcement they received from their parents during those same years. (see Appendix) The memory of the students was prompted by handing them a list of television programs from 1970, their preschool era. It was found that by seeing the selection available and recalling which they watched, they could calculate daily viewing time

more accurately than trying to recall their viewing time without prompts. Subsequent testing with this instrument showed high internal validity and reliability.
The retrospective accounts compared favorably with accounts of TV viewing recorded immediately.

Results

A One-way ANOVA run on CA by TV confirmed Hypothesis one (The preschool/elementary child who watches more than two hours of TV per day will be more likely to develop CA). The analysis of the TV viewing scores differed significantly according to the level of CA ($F(1/18) = 4.9508$, $p < .05$).

A follow up study done more than a year later, supported the results of H1: ($F(1/68) = 9.359$, $p < .05$).

Hypotheses three (The preschool/elementary school child who watches more than two hours of TV per day and who receives communication suppression will be more likely to develop high communication apprehension than the child who watches less TV and is encouraged by parents to express himself orally.), and two (The preschool/elementary child who experiences communication suppression will be more likely to develop CA.) were not confirmed. Neither the main effect for parents nor the interaction effect between

TV and parents was statistically significant. The score for the interaction on the ANOVA was ($F(2) = 2.391$, $p > .05$). The score on the One-way was ($F(1/18) = .2092$, $p > .05$).

An inspection of the means on the TV main effect revealed that students who reported low CA had a mean of 18.2 and those reporting high CA had a mean of 22.1. On the parent One-way the mean scores were low CA, 19.7 and high CA, 20.6. The mean scores for high and low CA were much closer together on the communication suppression test than on the TV test, indicating that the students effected by TV had more pronounced CA than those effected by communication suppression.

Insert Tables 1,2,3 about here

Discussion

The data clearly indicate that excessive TV viewing in early childhood is linked to CA. Those who reported high TV viewing were more apprehensive about their speech making than those who reported low TV viewing. The result is supportive of the rationale developed in this paper. While causality is not necessarily shown, correlation between TV and CA is indicated.

The implication of these data for the communication student are straight forward. If a child is watching

excessive TV in his preschool years he is consuming time when he should be learning the socialization process. If he is spending several hours a day in front of the TV set, he will not have time to interact with playmates, parents, or siblings in order to learn what is required to cope in a communicating world. And the more he fails to interact with others, the more appealing TV is because it does not require interaction, and provides para-social interpersonal satisfaction. A discussion of these issues could serve as a warning for parents of preschoolers, and day care center directors.

A non-significant relationship was found in the interaction between TV viewing and communication suppression. Although there was significance of one main effect, TV viewing at the $p < .05$ level, there was not significance of the communication suppression, nor significance of interaction of the two main effects. Therefore, H-2 and H-3 were not confirmed. The result poses a threat to the reasoning developed in this paper. If accurate, it suggests that communication suppression and its interaction with TV viewing is unrelated to CA.

Before accepting this interpretation though, an examination of the nature of this study is warranted. The study was small and needs to be expanded with more respondents, especially respondents who might never take a

speech class due to high CA. I propose to include required English composition classes in the expansion of the study because they should provide a more random sample. The testing instruments need revamping as well. Only the portion of the PRCA which dealt with public speaking was used, and by taking only a portion of the test, the results may have been skewed.

Given the results of this study, research that investigates TV viewing linked to CA ought to be pursued, using a larger and more random sample. It would be useful to continue to pursue the link between communication suppression and CA with a larger study that might give more disparate means. On the whole, though, it appears that TV viewing should be a red flag to parents who want their children to avoid CA.

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Table 1

ANOVA Scores of CA by TV Viewing and Communication Supp.

	F	df	MS	P
Main Effects	2.391	2	38.062	.123
TV	4.527	1	72.075	.049
CS	.005	1	.075	.946
2-Way Interactions				
TV & CS	1.361	1	21.675	.260
Explained	2.047	3	32.600	.148
Residual		16	15.922	

Table 2

ONE-WAY Scores of CA by TV & CA by Communication Supp.

	F	df	MS	P
CA by TV	4.95	1/18	76.0500	.0391
CA by CS	.2092	1/18	4.0500	.6529

Table 3

MEANS of CA Scores for each One-Way Test

	Low	High
CA by TV	18.2	22.1
CA by CS	19.7	20.6

APPENDIX A

SELF REPORT QUESTIONNAIRE

Communication Apprehension Survey

Directions: This questionnaire concerns your feelings about communication with other people. Please indicate in the space provided the degree to which each statement applies to you by marking whether you (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) are undecided, (4) disagree, or (5) strongly disagree with each statement. There are no right or wrong answers. Many of the statements are similar to other statements. Do not be concerned about this. Work quickly, just record your first impression.

1. As a preschooler I watched less than two hours of television per day. 1 2 3 4 5

2. As a preschooler I watched more than two hours of television per day. 1 2 3 4 5

3. From kindergarten through the third grade I watched less than two hours of television per day. 1 2 3 4 5

4. From kindergarten through the third grade I watched more than two hours of television per day. 1 2 3 4 5

5. As a preschooler my parents carried on conversations with me often. 1 2 3 4 5

6. When I was a preschooler, my parents encouraged quiet behavior. 1 2 3 4 5

7. After I started school, between 5 & 8 years of age, my parents encouraged me to talk to them at the dinner table. 1 2 3 4 5

8. I have no fear of giving a speech. 1 2 3 4 5

9. Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech. 1 2 3 4 5

10. I feel relaxed while giving a speech. 1 2 3 4 5

11. My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech 1 2 3 4 5

12. I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence. 1 2 3 4 5

13. While giving a speech I get so nervous I forget facts I really know. 1 2 3 4 5